

Televised Supreme Court to keep up with the times

Tonight would you rather watch Law and Order or Supreme Court Live?

Yes, it's a trick question because the second choice doesn't exist. Nor is it likely to in the near future.

But perhaps the tide is changing.

Our newest Supreme Court Justice, Elena Kagan, said in her confirmation hearings that she would be in favor of televising Supreme Court proceedings.

"I think it would be a terrific thing to have cameras in the courtroom," she said. "When you see what happens there, it's an inspiring sight."

We think so, too.

Inspiring, interesting, informative and, sadly, improbable.

The decision to bring cameras into the courtroom would have to be unanimous, and there are enough sitting justices opposed to the idea that the whole thing is pretty much a moot point -- at least for now.

Justice Anthony Kennedy is afraid that cameras would dumb down the system. He said, "We teach, by having no cameras, that we are different. We are judged by what we write. We are judged over a much longer term. We're not judged by what we say."

Justice Antonin Scalia, who was in favor of cameras earlier in his career, has had a change of heart, for pretty much the same reason. In 2006 he said, "If I thought that cameras in the Supreme Court would really educate the people, I would be all for it. But I think it would miseducate and misinform. Most of the time the court is dealing with bankruptcy code, the internal revenue code, (the labor law) ERISA -- stuff only a lawyer would love. Nobody's going to be watching that gavel-to-gavel except a few C-SPAN junkies. For every one of them, there will be 100,000 people who will see maybe 15 second take-out on the network news, which I guarantee you will be uncharacteristic of what the Supreme Court does."

We can see the opposition's point of view.

Last month we filmed our editorial board interviews for the two state Supreme Court races, which are being shown on Charter Cable and YouTube.

It was little disconcerting. In our case, it's an idea that we've toyed with for a couple of years, so we can understand their hesitations.

The justices may have valid concerns, but they seem self-serving -- good for the sitting justices, perhaps, but not so good for the public at large.

Sound bites or not, the court makes decisions that affect each of us, and we have an interest in those decisions.

It's not like the court proceedings are private. The court was never meant to operate in secret. The Supreme Court is open to the public and, in theory, you could attend court any day you like.

That is, if you were in Washington, D.C., and if you could find a seat in the typically packed courtroom.

Our world is changing.

Trains, planes and automobiles have made us a mobile in the last two centuries. Blogs, Twitter and Facebook connect the fabric of our society today.

Like it or not, we live in a virtual world. The Supreme Court needs to recognize -- even embrace -- our current environment.

Read more: <http://www.tri-cityherald.com/2010/08/10/1124820/televisesupremecourttokeep.html#ixzz0wFAUtgfv>